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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6062  
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0404  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0111  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 7092  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 5183  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3753  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0969  
RUEHNW/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3825  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2904  
RUEHPK/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2191  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7679  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 5360  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 0208  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000720

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/INS  
MCC FOR S. GROFF, D. TETER, D. NASSIRY AND E. BURKE  
TREASURY FOR LESLIE HULL

E.O 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [KCOR](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT APPOINTS BROTHER AS MINISTER OF PORTS AND AVIATION

REF: A) COLOMBO 263 B) COLOMBO 324 C) COLOMBO 394  
D) COLOMBO 502 E) COLOMBO 698 F) 06 COLOMBO 2086

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Rajapaksa has appointed his older brother, Chamal, as Minister of Ports and Aviation. The position makes Chamal responsible for oversight of several multi-million dollar ventures that the President has pushed, including an international port and airport in his home district, and Mihin Lanka, the new budget national carrier named after President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The President himself had held the ports and aviation portfolio since dismissing former Minister Mangala Samaraweera in February. By appointing his brother to the post, the President has again acted to maintain his immediate family's tight grip on the most lucrative and powerful ministries. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On 16 May 2007, Chamal Rajapakasa, Minister of Irrigation and Water Management (and brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa), was sworn in as Minister of Ports and Aviation at the President's offices. Chamal will continue to hold the Irrigation and Water Management portfolio. The President had served as the acting Minister of Ports and Aviation after dismissing former Minister Mangala Samaraweera from the position on February 9, ostensibly for breaching party discipline (ref A). Instead, Samaraweera appears to have been sacked because he opposed accumulation of executive power by the President and his brothers (ref B). After his dismissal, Samaraweera publicly stated that he had resisted the President's effort to ram through approvals of a budget airline named after the president and contracts for Chinese companies to build a major new port in the President's home district of Hambantota (ref C and D).

CHAMAL LESS INFLUENTIAL THAN HIS BROTHERS

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¶13. (SBU) Chamal is the eldest of President Rajapaksa's seven siblings (Ref E). With Mahinda as President, Basil as the Special Advisor to the President, and Gothabaya as the Secretary of Defense, Chamal is the least influential of the clan. Prior to his current postings, Chamal served as the Minister of Agriculture Development/Plantation Industries.

COMMENT: KEEPING THE PORTS AND AVIATION MINISTRY UNDER THE RAJAPAKSA CLAN

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¶14. (SBU) The Ports and Aviation Ministry is significant to the President's agenda. Various donors and investors have committed over a billion dollars to expand the Colombo sea and air ports and for infrastructure projects in Hambantota. In addition to the Hambantota port project, the President is also pushing development of a new international airport in Weerawila (also near the President's home district). The Hambantota projects have been controversial, because they do not appear to meet real economic demands and because the airport would threaten a vulnerable bird sanctuary (ref F).

¶15. (SBU) Recently, the President seemed eager to regain the popular Samaraweera's support by offering to bring him back into the Cabinet. Samaraweera is reported to have insisted on regaining his original portfolios. The President's appointment of his brother to the Ports and Aviation job both indicates that a rapprochement with Samaraweera is not in the offing and that the President wanted someone in this particular ministry who would not stand in the way of his signature port, airport, and airline projects.

BLAKE